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On Style Features, Inheritance and Development of Folk Songs in South and North Dong Minority

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Abstract

Due to territorial differences, Dong minority may be divided into South Dong minority and North Dong minority. The form and style of folk songs in two regions are widely different, and they have their respective features. The specific types of folk songs in South Dong minority and North Dong minority are set forth in this paper. From the perspective of modality, tonality, harmony, musical form and rhythm aesthetics, style features of the two are analyzed in a simple manner. Meanwhile, current problems faced by Dong music development are pondered over.

Key words: Folk song of Dong minority; South Dong; North Dong; Feature; Inheritance

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INTRODUCTION

Dong minority is mainly distributed in the areas adjacent to Guangxi, Guizhou and Hunan and in the southwest of Hubei. Due to the differences in geographical environment, language and culture, Dong minority includes southern dialect region and northern dialect region. Dong folk songs in the two regions also have different styles. Dong minority has been living near the mountains and by rivers, so Dong people retain

strong national customs. Except meeting the needs of material life, they also pursue spiritual life. Hence, Dong songs are the treasure and spiritual food of Dong people. All Dong people love to sing the songs. The development of folk songs tends to diversification. Their traditional music is mild, fine and smooth, but full of variations, including quiet melancholy lime mountains and cheerfulness like running water. Rich and colorful song types and diversified folk music activities reflect expectations for beautiful love and yearning for happy life. Without characters, Dong songs are basically handed down orally. Regardless of sacrificing, wedding or funeral, they cannot be separated from songs. Dong songs are interweaved with life of common people. They are also the carrier of history and culture of Dong minority and really reflect daily life of Dong people.

1. MUSIC TYPES OF FOLK SONGS OF SOUTH DONG MINORITY AND NORTH DONG MINORITY

1.1 North Dong Minority

North Dong region is adjacent to Han nationality and has been influenced by Han culture all the time. Thus, many factors of Han culture are fused in music form of Dong songs. Folk songs of North Dong are basically sung in Chinese. Dong folk songs in the north dialect region are dominated by monophonic mountain songs without melody accompaniment. Mountain songs are rich in contents, diversified in the form and wide in the range. All Dong people can sing mountain songs on the way or working in the field. The songs make laboring people enthusiastic and passionate. The melody is loud, sonorous and exciting, and the tune is ups and downs. The songs fully show bold, unrestrained and forthright character of Dong people. Dong folk songs can be roughly classified

into the following types of songs as per the types, contents and forms: Wanshan songs which are sung by young men and women during playing on mountains; Haoshi songs, also called drinking songs, which are sung during good festivals; Banjia songs: Before Dong girls get married, the girl which is closest to the bride and has not been married will be chosen to accompany the bride to sing until the bride gets married.

1.2 South Dong Minority

Different from folk songs without music accompaniment and with monophonic feature in North Dong region, some traditional multi-voice singing forms are retained in South Dong region due to little influence of Han culture. The melody of folk songs of South Dong is relatively steady, soft, lyric and euphemistic, and natural major interval is rarely used. If folk songs of North Dong minority is bold and generous like the waterfall flying from the mountainside, folk songs of South Dong minority is restrained and mild like streams in mountain creeks. There are numerous types of the folk songs in South Dong region, mainly including: Big songs, called "Galao" in Dong language; big songs with huge multi-voice are sung by a collectivity; small songs, also called "Gala" in Dong language; the tune of such songs is short and the melody is graceful, fluent and euphemistic and presents the color of natural minor; custom songs: they are sung in folk custom activities; main forms include Lanlu Song, Caitang Song, Drinking Song and Kuan Song etc.; ballad songs are a kind of narration-based songs with huge structure; the contents of songs cover a large range, such as historical figures, legends and love stories.

2. MUSIC FORM FEATURES OF FOLK SONGS OF SOUTH DONG MINORITY AND NORTH DONG MINORITY

2.1 Music Form Structure

Usually, the words and music of folk songs of North Dong minority are consistent. Tune structure and lyric structure of songs keep consistent. Melody sections of songs are divided according to lyrics. The basic form of lyrics is that seven characters form a sentence, and the whole song consists of four sentences. The overall style is regular. Of course, not all songs are subject to such mode. Typical big songs of South Dong minority are taken as an example in this paper. Music form structure is relatively fixed. The number of phrases in each song is usually even number. The adjacent two phrases form a unit. Countless units form a complete song.

2.2 Modality and Tonality

Folk songs of North Dong minority are mainly based on pentatonic scale and dominated by single modality.

Occasionally, there is partial tune apart from pentatonic scale, which appears in the song in the form of appoggiatura, up and down portamento. Except decorating songs and enhancing emotional color, they sometimes will promote modality to change or alternate. Big songs of South Dong minority generally adopt La modality. La tune and Do tune are usually sustained tune. Just because of euphemistic and soft La modality, pure and natural sense of beauty sends out after fusion with peculiar tunes of Dong language.

2.3 Rhythm and Beat

Impromptu, flexibility and freedom are the most typical features of folk songs of North Dong minority, so the rhythm and beat are also rich and varying. In a song, there may be more than one fixed beat form. In different occasions, singers will alter the beat temporally through changing singing speed. Alternate appearance of multiple mixed beats is very characteristic. Most folk songs of North Dong minority adopt steady and slow rhythmic pattern, such as 2-8, 8-16 and 16-8. Of course, there is also syncopated rhythm and dotted rhythm to enhance jumping with music emotion. The rhythm and beat of folk songs of South Dong minority usually approximate alternation of free rhythm type and regular type. A non-periodic feature is presented.

2.4 Lyric and Rhythm

Folk songs of North Dong minority can also be classified into three types according to rhyming laws: full rhymed songs in which the first, second and fourth sentences must rhyme; semi-rhymed songs in which even-number sentences and off-number sentences rhyme the same rhyme, or the first half part and the second half part rhyme the same rhyme, respectively; rhyme-free songs without rhyme. Generally, folk songs of North Dong minority are of four-sentence pattern, and there are no strict provisions on the number of characters (as long as the number of characters is an odd number). They stress the unification of style and form to enhance the song fluency. By contrast, the folk songs of South Dong minority

2.5 Music Style

Folk songs of North Dong minority are characterized by frank and honest emotional expression, and lightness. They are decorated by various grace notes such as up and down portamento as well as low echo to form very characteristic tune. Abundant and varying rhythm make melody slow and jumping. The melody line is sometimes fluctuant, which highlights bold and generous character of Dong people. Folk songs of South Dong minority are characterized by steady tune and plainness. Most songs adopt dialect of Dong minority to narrate, which gives listeners soft feeling like water.

3. INHERITANCE WAY OF FOLK SONGS OF DONG MINORITY

Dong songs are closely related to daily life of Dong people and also their spiritual pillar. Due to different regional cultures and life habits in the south and north regions, inheritance ways of folk songs are also diverse.

Since North Dong minority is deeply influenced by Han nationality and other adjacent nationalities, the large-scale and well-organized singing form was lost early. Hence, singing time and place are very casual. Usually, people will sing impromptu when working on the hillside or in the field. Regardless of adults or children, all of them are influenced by such environmental atmosphere. Then, when adults sing mutually, children are influenced by what they constantly see and hear. Thus, children also learn many Dong songs and then hand them down from generation to generation. Another inheritance way is annual singing festival with national features in North Dong minority. In the singing festival, Dong people gather together from all directions and competition to sing. Those singing well will be imitated by others who will learn from the strong points to offset the weakness. Later, an excellent folk song is formed and handed down.

Folk songs of South Dong minority are mainly taught by singing teachers who are the best singers in Dong villages. Except favorable voice conditions, singing teachers must own good memory ability and imitation ability. According to the tone color, numerous singing teams are classified into male voice teams and female voice teams; according to the age, singing teams are classified into children teams, youth teams and old-age teams etc. Singing team is an important organization structure of communication of South Dong folk songs and mainly directed by singing teachers. There is also an indispensable part in inheritance of folk songs, i.e. special singing place of South Dong folk songs. Folk song inheritance in South Dong region is a complete chain. The singing team is the foundation of folk song inheritance; the singing teacher is central instructor of the singing team; drum tower is a training place of the singing team; the combination of the three makes folk song inheritance rigorous, organized and systematic.

4. DEVELOPMENT STATUS, PROTECTION AND COMMUNICATION OF MUSIC CULTURE OF DONG MINORITY

With economic development and era progress, music of Dong minority no longer bursts into bloom in hidden mountain forest. Such unique music culture gradually goes global and displays its beautiful posture to the whole world. In particular, multi-voice songs (i.e. big songs) strike a pose on the stage in Paris Autumn Art Festival from performance in villages. Later, they gain consistently

good reputation in foreign performance many times. Such Chinese national music art is gradually known by others and the whole world feels its charm.

However, behind such honors and praises, inheritance and development of Dong music are still faced with some problems. For example, inheritors are few; the thought wave of modern civilization sweeps, so the thought of “getting rid of poverty and becoming rich” goes deep into the heart of young people; they are unwilling to contact traditional music culture of Dong minority, so Dong music has no inheritor now. Nowadays, it is an era of digitized information. Traditional ways of communication such door-to-door visit and oral teaching are replaced by mobile phone, phone and email. The diversity of ways makes some traditional cultures vanish. Music culture closely related to life is also caught in crisis. Modern scientific education weakens people’s belief in sacrificing and blessing in traditional Dong music. All sorts of modern recreation ways change traditional recreation mode and life style so that it is very hard for Dong music to keep independent development.

Therefore, effective and feasible measures must be taken to enhance protection of Dong music.

4.1 Dong Music as a Content of Quality-Oriented Education Should Be Brought Into Music Teaching Materials for Primary and Middle Schools

It is feasible and effective to regard primary and middle school students as the objects of cultivation in order to communicate and inherit national music. Talent cultivation demonstration bases for big songs of Dong minority are built in several primary and middle schools as well as kindergartens in Dong minority settlement place – Liping County in Guizhou Province. Big songs of Dong minority are introduced in music teaching, and primary and middle school students are required to participate in singing big songs of Dong minority and receive national cultural education of Dong music. The students perform outstandingly in two Colorful Guizhou Singing Contests and gain good results. Introducing Dong music in school education can enrich campus culture, communicate and inherit Dong culture. Dong culture and classroom can be well combined interactively. For example, in music class, after learning folk songs of Dong minority, specific scene may be set to sing, such as singing happy songs in festivals and toasting songs in wine parties to enhance folk song learning enjoyment; in fine arts class, students may be required to draw the costume of Dong minority and know features of costume of Dong minority.

4.2 Reform and Innovate Lyric Content and Singing Mode of Dong Folk

Changeless art has no vitality. To gain long-term development of Dong music, innovation is required. Firstly, in terms of singing form, Dong songs are usually sung by singing teams. Each singing team usually

consists of over ten people, and women and men cannot be mingled. The structure of singing teams may be enriched by building mixed singing teams and expanding the number of singing team members. Based on the performance form of Dong songs without accompaniment and command, the form of accompaniment and command may be recomposed, or Dong songs may be recomposed to piano music and symphony etc. so that the public can easily accept them. In addition, in terms of lyric content, lyrics of Dong songs generally eulogize nature, labor, love and friendship. The original aesthetic standards are also retained. With the change of the era, lyrics may praise the motherland, the world and happy life in modern society as well as some fresh things in life. More song forms will be generated during the new composition of lyrics so that Dong songs can keep original music features and advance with the era.

4.3 Save Dong Songs Close to Being Lost in Communication and Keep Them With Modern Means

Many folk songs of Dong minority cannot be well inherited and developed due to remote position or the reduction of inheritors. Only few people can sing such songs, and most are old people. Thus, it is pressing to save lost Dong songs. We may adopt such ways of collection of folk songs and interview to search, gather and record folk songs. Then, they may be kept through printing, publishing or tapes and discs as well as modern multimedia form.

4.4 Enhance Protection of Traditional Festivals and Carry Out Traditional Cultural Activities of Dong Minority

There are numerous traditional festivals of Dong minority, such as Fireworks Festival, Seedling Transplanting Festival, Singing Festival and Bullfighting Festival. It is required to actively organize and carry out local folk custom activities. The government should give material and policy support. Besides, they may be developed as tourism resources. In this way, more people can know

Dong culture, expand the influence of folk culture of Dong minority, bring income for Dong people and promote economic prosperity of Dong region.

CONCLUSION

Dong music is a treasure in Chinese national music culture. It records real life of Dong people and reflects laboring people's love for life and pursuit of beautiful things. In terms of audio and visual aesthetics, it is a kind of music art; in terms of historical research, it is a history of nationality. In the face of impacts caused by modern civilization, traditional Dong music better needs to update ideas, absorb artistic features of contemporary musical culture, absorb the essence and remove the dross, innovate and advance in the era except good protection. As a young generation, we are obligated to facilitate communication and development of Dong music. Therefore, we should continuously explore, search, actively innovate and reform Dong music. It is believed that Dong music will give off more brilliant light in the future.

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